

Reaching Out with Telephone Hotlines

One way to keep in touch with your customers is a telephone hotline with up-to-date information. This

information line can serve as an easy-access resource for customers who want information about pesticide disposal and integrated pest management (IPM).

Customers may not always know where to take pesticides for disposal. This is sometimes complicated by the fact that collection centers are only open on specific dates. In addition to such information, the hotline could announce special events or promotions involving your facility. A recording can be updated on a regular basis, and the phone number should be included on print materials used by your public education campaign.

The cost of a hotline varies, depending upon whether you want a local number or a toll-free number. A local number would cost about \$70 to set up and approximately \$15 per month to maintain. A toll-free number costs approximately \$30 to establish and \$15 a month to maintain. (With a toll-free number, you will also be charged for incoming long-distance calls.)

The costs cited above are for telephone lines only. The equipment needed to operate a hotline may range in cost from \$50 for a simple answering machine to thousands of dollars for specialized equipment that allows an unlimited

number of messages played consecutively. Toll-free service can track the number of incoming calls to your hotline to measure its usefulness.

Evaluation of Method

Pros: Easy resource for people to obtain information on pesticide use and disposal. The hotline could be publicized with all public education materials.

Cons: Cost for setting up and managing either a single toll-free number or a series of numbers can be prohibitive. Costs can be reduced by partnering with other agencies that have similar hotlines. You could add your message to an existing number for a fraction of what it may cost to operate a number yourself.

Share a Hotline or Establish Your Own

Both options have distinct advantages. You may want to consider the pros and cons of both before making your final decision.

Investigate community-service numbers. These phone lines may be promoted in city/county directories, on Web sites, and in the community section in the phone book. Several local numbers may be operated by the city or county, local

phone companies, or other agencies and corporations. Many of these phone numbers provide multiple lines for different topics. Pesticide information could be classified under health and safety, gardening, or environmental issues.

The other option is to create your own hotline, either by modifying an existing line or establishing a dedicated number.

This option could be more costly if you choose to create a new number for the program. With your own line, you can dedicate messages to other district programs as well as the *H₂O Home to Ocean* program. You also have the ability to make quick changes to the messages, whereas sharing with others may limit changes to once or twice a month.

Script and Hotline Tip Suggestions

There are two things to keep in mind when creating the recordings on your hotline:

- Messages must be consistent and they should be updated on a regular basis. For consistency, use similar messages and tips.
- Messages should be updated weekly, and even more frequently when specific dates are highlighted.

Some examples of short messages to include on your hotline:

“It’s springtime and your thoughts are turning to gardening and home improvement projects. When using pesticides, purchase only what you need, read all directions carefully, and don’t dump pesticides down drains or on sidewalks and driveways where they might run off and contaminate our water.”

“Keep your home clean and your garden green while protecting the environment. Read the labels on all pesticide products, follow instructions carefully and never dump excess products down your sink or into storm drains. Dispose according to the label directions and protect our water, from home to ocean.”

“Are the bugs in your garden bugging you? Prevent unwanted pests in and around your home by following a few easy tips... Protect beneficial insects that control destructive pests... Clean up debris around your home and garden... and eliminate food sources such as leftover pet food and open garbage containers.”

“As spring begins and you turn to garden activities, remember three steps to pesticide safety: Buy only what you need... Use every product according to label directions... dispose of all pesticides according to label directions.”